

Debating and Documenting Africa – a Conversation

Compiled by
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Editor's Note

In June and July 2008, information and development scholars and practitioners engaged in a sustained email conversation regarding documenting African history. The debate starts with a message sent by Shiraz Durrani to UNESCO on its “Memories of the World Programme”. He also circulated this message to a number of people active in the field of Pan Africanism, including Ali Abdul Yekin. This led to the exchange reproduced below. It is noteworthy that a very positive response has been received from UNESCO which has already set up a Programme entitled “Roads to Independence in Africa: the African Liberation Heritage”. While the debate on the role of UNESCO and other international bodies can continue, concrete documentation work has already been started by UNESCO. African people, on whose behalf we are discussing key issues here, would certainly be poorer if we decide to turn our backs on such praise-worthy initiatives.

ISJ hopes that the debate started in this exchange will be continued in other fora and invites responses from readers on issues raised here.

1.0 Introduction

Tar and Durrani (2007) discuss emerging spaces for debating Africa and the Global South, saying that people are “taking advantage of the new possibilities opened up by technological developments. They are making increasing use of the internet, emails, chatrooms, listservers, blogs, Youtube etc. to create new communities of resistance and change”. This is an important development for people of the South as it enables many more people to be active in discussing issues that relate to the full liberation of millions of people from economic and political strangulation.

Indeed, the journal *Information, Society and Justice* (ISJ)² itself is one such “emerging space” and in this issue, it continues the debate on African liberation. This issue reproduces a

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correspondence between Shiraz Durrani, the Coordinating Editor of ISJ and Ali Abdul Yekin, the Coordinator the Action Group of Africa, on a number of issues of relevance to the liberation of Africa.

Issues covered in the correspondence include pan-Africanism, the role of external bodies in African liberation and the contribution that academicians can make in that liberation. It also raised important issues relating to the role of information in liberation and the need to document the history of Africa and its struggle for African liberation. ISJ feels that it is important for more people to be involved in discussing these issues.

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2. Shiraz Durrani, 6th June 2008 – Letter to Joe Springer, Chief of Section, UNESCO Information Society Division - Universal Access and Preservation Section (CI/INF/UAP)

Dear Joie Springer, **Subject: Memories of the World – Kenya (& Africa).** I note the important role that UNESCO plays within the Memories of the World programme. I wonder if there is a possibility of collecting memories of the liberation struggle in Kenya (Africa in the long term) from colonialism over 500 years. A large amount of oral material is lost as generations of activities die with their memories unrecorded. At the same time, written material is often dispersed in different part of the world, for example in Europe and India in the case of Kenya. At the same time material culture which reflects people’s lives and struggles is plundered or dispersed in former colonial countries and held by private and public collections and speculators.

Perhaps the first step is to set up a register of all such material and then to establish a virtual and a real archive of all such material. I would like to suggest that a pilot project be done for material on Kenya from 1884 to 1963. Such a pilot would provide valuable lessons on how to set up a wider project.

As a start, perhaps UNESCO can support some of the ideas (see the section “What I expect to be done”) I set out in my submission to the proposed Task Force On Truth, Justice And Reconciliation Commission in 2003 [in Kenya]. I copy the submission below.

I hope it will be possible for UNESCO to support such projects in Africa which has suffered from lack of resources and attention more than other continents. The London

² ISJ – available at www.londonmet.ac.uk/isj

Metropolitan University would be interested in preparing an initial scoping paper in partnership with Kenyan Universities and Archives. Looking forward to a positive response, Best wishes. Shiraz.

2.1 Attachment to Shiraz Durrani's submission to UNESCO

To: Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (Kenya). Submission [on Pio Gama Pinto] by Shiraz Durrani

Submission

On behalf of all progressive Kenyans, I submit that the basic human rights of Pio Gama Pinto have been violated during the rule of the successive Kanu Governments.

Background

Pio Gama Pinto was born in Nairobi on March 31, 1927. He was assassinated in Nairobi on February 24, 1965. In his short life of 38 years, he has become a symbol of anti-imperialist struggles in Kenya. His selfless work for Kenya set a new standard for judging patriotism and commitment. His contribution to the struggle for real freedom spanned two continents - Africa and Asia. It covered two phases of imperialism - colonialism and neo-colonialism. His enemies saw no other way to stop the lifelong struggle waged by Pinto except through an assassin's bullets fired at point blank range.

It is generally believed that those in senior position in the Government were involved in, or were aware of, the plot to assassinate Pinto. The Government has not appointed an independent review to establish the facts in this matter; nor have any official attempts been made subsequently to research Pinto's role in the liberation of Kenya. Those who have attempted to do so have been intimidated by the former Kanu Government and stopped from doing any research on him.

Loss and damage suffered

- Pinto suffered the ultimate violation of his human rights - loss of life.
- Pinto's family has been deprived of a loving husband and father.
- Pinto's sacrifice and that of his family [³] has not been honoured or compensated for.
- Kenya has been denied the wealth of ideas, experience and commitment that Pinto brought to the struggle for liberation of Kenyan people
- People struggling for liberation in Goa, Angola, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and other parts of the world have had one of their most ardent supporters removed from their midst.
- Pinto's right to justice has been violated by the Government of Kenya by not investigating and bringing to court the people who were really responsible for his assassination.

³ When Pinto died Emma and Pio had three young children.

- The Government of Kenya has deprived the young generation of Kenya from knowing the real history of Pinto's contribution to the struggle for independence and liberation in Kenya.

What I expect to be done

- Immediate independent and public investigation of the assassination of Pinto. Those responsible to be charged for their crime.
- Compensate Pinto's family for the immense loss they suffered with the assassination of Pinto.
- The greatest tribute that the Government can pay Pio Gama Pinto is to show the same concern to Pinto that Pinto himself had about those who sacrificed their property, educational and other opportunities, limbs or even lives in the cause of independence. He wrote:

The sacrifices of the hundreds of thousands of Kenya's freedom fighters must be honoured by the effective implementation of the policy - a democratic, African, socialist state in which the people have the right to be free from economic exploitation and the right to social equality. Kenya's uhuru must not be transformed into freedom to exploit, or freedom to be hungry and live in ignorance. Uhuru must be uhuru for the masses - uhuru from exploitation, from ignorance, disease and poverty.⁴

- Erect national monuments in all major towns in Kenya to honour the memory of Pinto and other freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for Kenya's struggle for liberation.
- Set up of a National Liberation Research, Museum and Archives Centre where the histories, publications and material culture of all national heroes can be collected and used as part of Kenya's heritage. This needs to happen urgently so that Pinto's contemporaries can be interviewed. Many such prominent people have died over the years and Pinto's real history is in danger of being lost.
- Set up a Pio Gama Pinto International Award to honour those who make an outstanding contribution to the political, economic and social liberation of Africa.
- Set up a Pio Gama Pinto Chair of History at the University of Nairobi to encourage research on the Kenyan struggle for liberation.

Dated: 10 August, 2003, London.

3. UNESCO response – 04 July 2008

Joie Springer from UNESCO has responded to the above message and provides details of a UNESCO project entitled 'Roads to Independence in Africa: the African Liberation Heritage Programme'. This involves the establishment of regional programme to

⁴ Pinto, Pio Gama (1963) "Glimpses of Kenya's Nationalist Struggle". *Pan Africa*. December 12, p.39.

“valorize African liberation heritage”. This envisages the construction of a museum, library and archives with the aim of acknowledging the importance of liberation movements to the process of decolonization of the continent.

While recognizing the role of liberation movements in the struggle for independence in Africa, the programme will also highlight the role of civil society organizations and liberation movements to the achievement of independence.

The Project is based in Dar es Salaam and has the three main objectives:

- galvanizing and sustaining research into the liberation heritage of southern Africa with a view to establishing the diversity of heritage resources in the SADC region;
- developing processes and identifying means of valorizing the heritage of Africa's "roads to independence" to foster ownership of the liberation heritage among all stakeholders in the region;
- building capacities of heritage professionals in the strategic management and presentation of Africa's liberation heritage.

According to Joie Springer, UNESCO would be willing to work with the London Metropolitan University and other partners in “further developing the pilot project for Kenya from 1884 to 1963 as proposed”. London Metropolitan University will now explore the possibility of obtaining financial support to cover the inclusion of the Kenyan archives in the project.

4. Kofi Ali Abdul-Yekin responds, June 2008

Dear Durrani, I read your letter to Joie Springer on Memories of the World – Kenya (& Africa) with great detail and passion, and felt the need to make some observations. I beg to say that you have a strong attachment for the Africa of yesterday that is finding it very difficult to come to terms with the realities of today. The Africa of today is definitely struggling to shed away its colonial past and all the shackles that hold it back with the past. Africa has evolve for herself an institution to responsible for all need addressing in Africa by the formation of the African Union Government. Orchestrating tribal sentiments in any form in Africa merely for academic exercise that turns up to fuel the already bad situation is a bit concerning.

For how long are we going to be shuttling between the local Kenya Government and the United Nations? Are we not the same people that complains about the atrocities of the Colonialists and the way the imperialists exploit the UN institutions? When are we going to start addressing our letters to the African Union Government instead of this Disunited Nations?

Ali

I note the important role that UNESCO plays within the Memories of the World programme

5. Shiraz Durrani responds to Ali, 12 June 2008

Thanks Ali for your thoughts on my message to UNESCO. You raise some important points. However I do not agree with some of your assumptions or your perspectives.

I would agree that we do need to “come to terms with realities of today”. And that is precisely why I wrote to UNESCO. The reality of today is that most (all?) African countries cannot or do not take independent action on cultural (and economic and political) issues. Added to that, no Africa-wide organisation with sufficient political clout to take up such (or indeed any) issues exists. Making meaningless pleas to non-existing entities is in reality no action at all. Nor do I see any prospects in the near future of an independent African Union Government emerging, given the global political and power realities today.

The options for us then are (1) to wait for such a politically strong Africa-wide body to emerge before we take any action to document our cultural heritage while history is being lost or stolen for private profit; (2) make the most of whatever resources we currently have – including UNESCO – to make a start; (3) do the second while we work towards the first. This last approach is the one I am taking. Indeed, that is why I copied my message to you and Allan as well as to a few other people working towards a Pan African future. Such united action in different arenas can help us reach our common goal. The process itself of working together can indeed be a beginning – however small – of building African unity. This does not equal to “a strong attachment for the Africa of yesterday”.

As for your point “orchestrating tribal sentiments in any form in Africa merely for academic exercise”: What you call “tribal”, I would call African “nationalities”. I am not clear as to what you see in my message to UNESCO (copied below) that is “tribal”. One cannot deny the reality that African people are not one homogeneous group. Maintaining this myth is not only going against reality, but doing African people a disservice. The issue here is that colonial and neo-colonial interests have turned our nationalities into “tribes” who are then presented as having opposing interests, and used as a basis of “divide and rule”. In a similar way, religion is used today to divide people, are we then going to deny that different religions exist in Africa and maintain we are “orchestrating religious sentiments merely for academic exercise”? The real challenge for us is to see the unity of common history and interests in different nationalities as a basis of a new unity based on principles of equality and justice. Whether one likes it or not, colonial history and reality on the ground has ensured that people in Africa today do see their nationalities as an important aspect of their identity. We need to accept this aspect of African identity if we are going to unify Africa. But then we also need to strengthen the continental aspect of that identity.

If we accept that there are different African nationalities, and that historically each nationality has had its own culture and history of anti-colonial (and other) struggles, it is then acceptable to document their history *as a history of that nationality*. This does not imply that there is no such thing as “Kenyan history” or “African history”. One needs to see a dynamic picture with many different aspects. Each aspect needs to be recorded and analysed so as to arrive as a composite whole. Ignoring the particular history of different African nationalities will not allow us to come to a real understanding of the history of any African country or indeed of the continent as a whole. Within this, there is also a case of seeing the particularities of the history and struggles at other levels, e.g. gender, but this should not be seen as “orchestrating gender sentiments” to paraphrase your views.

Further, given present realities, no change process can take place on a continent-wide scale. Change has to start in the context of local particularities. Given the reality of nationalities as mentioned above, it is entirely appropriate to start the documentation process at a nationality level provided it is based on the principal of equality for ALL

nationalities. One can also make a case that such documentation needs to be done at a national level too – and there is no contradiction between doing both – as indeed at an African level as well.

As for UNESCO: with all its lack of independent power and the reality of control by Western interests and government, it still has a capacity for doing some good. I do not believe in rejecting everything that is not entirely what I want it to be. That would be throwing the baby with the bathwater. We need to use whatever positive forces that are around to make whatever progress we can make with the resources we currently have. Rejecting anything positive because it is not entirely what we want is like not taking advantage of a slight opening of the door to freedom but to wait until the entire door is open. A tree grows big from a small shoot. [by rejecting the shoot, one rejects the tree]. You note “the important role that UNESCO plays within the Memories of the World programme” – yet do you propose to be part of this important role just because you are worried about the “Disunited Nations”. I do not agree with that. An implication of your argument would be that Africa should not work with FAO even as our food situation worsens. I would certainly not agree with that. We do need to be vigilant and ensure African interests are at the forefront but that does not mean we reject all partnership work. Indeed there is also a case of using African power to influence UN policies and practices as one way of ensuring democracy in the organisation.

You are correct to say that “the Africa of today is definitely struggling to shed away its colonial past and all the shackles that hold it back with the past”. But that does not imply that we live in a dream world of waiting for an African Union Government and take no action to preserve our history and cultures that are gradually being lost to history.

You seem to see my attempt to preserve African history as an “academic exercise”. I see a central role that progressive academics **MUST** play in African liberation – in partnership with advanced workers and peasants. Dismissing any initiative on the basis of “academic exercise” is counter-productive and short-sighted and will certainly delay the final liberation of Africa for decades, if not centuries. Academic input is also essential if we are to ensure “African interests are at the forefront” in all aspects of our struggle to unify Africa.

I would like to end on a positive note. Africa desperately needs discussion and dialogue as the first essential step towards building unity. It is only in the context of vigorous discussions that correct ideas and visions can emerge to ensure African liberty. I hope our discussion has helped us move in that direction, while building greater understanding of each other’s points of view.

6. Ali Abdul-Yekin responds, 25 June 2008

Dear Durrani, Subject: African history and cultural heritage. I felt greatly honoured and a strong sense of challenge on how much my self and other Africans can learn from you. Your mail expressed a great sense of maturity, patients and having met you personally as a person that humble himself, at least on one occasion, I have no doubt of your sincerity of purpose.

I equally have not doubt that you will condole the fact that we have to agree to disagree and disagree to agree, for us to usher in the true African renaissance amidst a sense of frankness with one another in our discuss.

On this note, I do find it difficult in coming to terms with the four key points addressed by your mail “**Memories of the world**” which are; the need for less recognition of the

AUG (African Union Government) due to its incompetency, the UNESCO as the African way forward, the sincerity of purpose by the African intellectual academicians and the need for the preservation of the African History and Cultures for its mere sake.

The African Union Government is the only institution in the world that was formed in Africa, run by Africans with the sole responsibility of solving the common challenges of Africa. This institution is a continuum of the OAU (Organization of the African Unity) formed in 1963. The central theme on which this institution was formed is “Africa for Africans”. At the time of its formation in the 60’s when most African countries were just struggling to learn to say “No” to the colonialists, you could recall that some African countries could not bring themselves to the thought of saying the word “No” to their colonial masters, as heeding to the call for a United States of Africa actually implies saying “No”. This attitude resulted in the Casablanca and the Monrovia Groups. In fact, most of those who were finding it difficult to take the necessary stride in committing themselves to the Union government of the time, turned out to be those that were struggling more with internal tribal cum sectarian challenges and the wars that erupted in these nations immediately afterwards, were good confirmation of what we are saying. The Nigerian Civil War of 1967 was a good case in mind. The resultant OAU that was forged out of the constraints confronting the then African leaders had it self plagued by tribalism and sectionalism playing us all back into the hand of imperialism.

No body can deny the fact that this institution today referred to as the Union Government of Africa is run by Africans who are the very African that are running the various failing countries of Africa. It is also true that every institution in Africa, including the AU Government, is being indirectly influenced in its decision making and exploited by the imperialists. I however find it difficult to come to terms with those that holds the opinion that Africa and Africans had to resort to none African for the governance of Africa because Africans are not being able to run their affairs. These are exactly the views and reasons that are given to us by none Africans and their sympathisers; to own, cultivate and till our land while we continued to work for them, because we “cannot work on our own properly” according to them. These individuals seek and give every reason to sustain the failing African states despite their failures while the same people close their eyes tightly to the Union Government, rather than the other way round.

We have been struggling with the need to “de-internationalize” the African countries and having Africa as a whole to take up that role. I did made reference in your mail of the “Africa of Yesterday” which is all about the so called “international borders” imposed on us in 1884 by the Berlin Conference. Our greatest challenge today is to redefine these international curses called “borders” as imaginary lines the imperialists have forced unto us that have always continued to make us see ourselves as strangers on the same land helplessly facing the same problem of imperialism.

Most people will agree with me that most of those who are running the African countries and the Union government’s institutions today are the very people who once were claiming to be champions of “Pan Africanism”. All we have known are individuals with psychologically trivialized brains entrapped in tribalism. If we are to go by the words practically, “Pan” actually means “the wider view”, implying, “the ideology of considering the challenges of Africa from an African wide perspective and prescribing a solution accordingly”. So if this is truly the case, then the so called Pan Africanists will do us all a lot of good in helping to lay all hands on deck to make the only existing practical Pan African institution work than this hypocritical dream of coming up with another body, other than the AU Government, as clearly indicated in your reply.

On the issues of the main letter to UNESCO that actually aggravated this discussion, I still find it difficult to accept the reasons given for the letter to UNESCO as convincing instead of having this letter addressed to the AU Government. The main reason according to the reply was that the AU government is not good enough in dealing with the African problem, thus the need to resort to the World wide institution. I want to say that this is more of personal choice and motive than facts and logics. The way UNESCO was presented in the reply is like saying that the Missionaries are good to the Africans but the Colonialists are not. What is the difference between UN (The United Nations) and UNESCO (The United Nations' Economic, Social and Cultural Organization)? Are the WTO (World Trade Organization), World Bank, UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), WFO (World Food Organization), IMF (International Monetary Fund), etc, not all organs of the UN? Are these not the very institutions we all arrive on a consensus that they are being used to exploit Africa? This act of "running to the UN, EU, and Washington, is a way of saying that we have an alternative to our Union Government and that should not be the case. Is that not the same excuse the neo-colonialists have been employing in finding their way back to our formal colonial masters? Do we need somebody to tell us that the UN and all its organs belong to "everybody" in the world while the AU Government and its institution belong to us Africans only? Is this not an opportunity to inform ourselves that what belong to everybody actually belongs to nobody but rather serves as a front for faceless criminals to operate? Do we need an angel to tell us that the future of the African is in his own hands and his only tool for this is his Union Government?

There was UN in existence and we were members of the institution before our fathers stood up to form the Union Government for us to solve our African unique but common problems. Here we are by our actions now saying that our fathers were stupid to waste their time in forming the institution for us? Why didn't our fathers just sit down and contend themselves with the way the UN was going about their business amidst the world's problems, like some of our brothers are advocating today? Is this not a premise for a divided loyalty to our African Union Government and our dead heroes that have fallen in championing the same course? The only choice for the true African is the Union government our fathers have laid a foundation for which is what I called "Our true Heritage".

The opinion I am having is that, certain group of Africans are trying to say that they are having a reason to over look the short comings of the UN with its organs and trying to come up with a better way in which the UN can work better for the world. It is just so sad that these group of Africans do not see any reason to rather show the same sympathy for the short comings of their Union Government and joining in working with other progressive Africans to come up with proactive solutions, within the current African realities, in the challenges of recreating our Great African institution that has let us all down.

There is no doubt that that the solution to the problem of Kenya, like that of any African country, is not in Kenya as indicated by the recent socio-eco-political unrest aggravated by perceived injustice in a decision of the nation via an election. The fact that the whole unfortunate situation was stirred into safety by an African in the person of Kofi Annan, not necessarily a Kenyan but a fellow citizen of the AU Government like any Kenyan, indicates that with the necessary resources which I called the right people's mandate, the Africans can run Africa better, if not the same, as the Americans are running the USA. In all honesty, there are more and better Africans than we have seen on their way to serve the Union government in due course.

The African intellectuals are a people I bravely picked on to whom you tried to defend in all honesty. This group of people are very vital for Africa and her Union Government to work. I however do not know of how much aware you are of the negative opinion the average African is having about the African academician? An intellectual is any body that has been able to acquire formal education and experiences enough to be able to analyse a situation with a higher ability of recommending a more practical way forward. These ways forward have formed the premises on which policy frame work are based and if they are genuinely good, result in national development. The African intellectual has been part and parcel of all the African policy decision making from the local government, to the various national governments and to the Union government. 85% of all the advisers of the African governments comprises of the so called “intellectuals”. They have wrongly advice and helped to plunder the resources of Africa by leading the delegations of Africans in signing foreign contracts that never existed. These intellectuals have worked and headed key positions in African institutions and have connived with others to sabotage us all. In fact, the African intellectuals are the architects of the African plight of today with its gloomy future.

It is now looking like the African intellectuals are turning around to blame the very so called “African leaders” in exonerating themselves from the common sins, like the Pharisee did in blaming the very God they have worked for, promoted and defended all along, for the doom of the people, rather than owning up to their right status as accomplice. Is the greatness of China today not the hard work of the Chinese intellectuals and politicians as the greatness of India by the hard work of Indian intellectuals and politicians? What do we say and show for the African intellectuals and politicians to the African Union Government than failures and perpetual foreign dependency? Her they are again orchestrating their habitual intellect of dependency calling on us to join them in their tradition of going a-begging and as-sorrowing from the UN and the UNESCO. What is the pride of an educated beggar? The fact that we are shying away from the African messes we have collectively created and resorting to sending our concerns to the UN and UNESCO is a clear indication that we are aware of what we have done wrong. The concern here is how many of us are realizing that the ordinary African is looking up to us for our repentance? Do we even own to the fact that the ugly African plight falls squarely on the shoulders of the African intellectuals? Once again, for how long are we Africans going to continue to destroy and disown what is ours, and think we can run to “Nobody” as some us refer to the almighty Disunited Nations for solutions to our problems?

I have heard so many Africans, with particular reference to the African intellectuals, talking about the African Cultural Heritage and History. In fact a specific reference was made in your reply to me about the need for the preservation of the African cultural heritage, the concern is how serious are the advocates of the preservation of the African heritage? So have we chosen to leave in London, like other Africans in the metropolitan cities of the Europe, *posing as the preservers of the crude and outdated life of the African that is in it self struggling to cling on to time?*

Some time ago, our fathers were using most of what we make reference to as our cultural traditions as tools of decision making in the challenges of surviving better. They evolved and use items like cutlass and hoes to farm and cultivate their land to feed their then tiny population as well as their herbal medicinal concoctions backed with supernatural devices to help them confront the challenges of their time. These practices were defencelessly in place when the colonialists attacked and invaded us to turn us into their slaves for centuries. Most of our people have now moved on as the reality of teaming population have indicated that reliance on the local river as our sources of water is not the way

forward. The cutlass, hoes and the shifting cultivations are just not allowing us to be what we truly want to be in the global competitive, realistic and dynamic family. The mechanized farming and other technological way of dealing with life are giving us no option as the road to the future. Almost every one of those whose cultural heritage the “moralists and naturalists” are protecting are themselves busy replacing them with more efficient way of living, as they have realized that their crude approaches comes with nothing but doom.

I am beginning to believe that these treasure hunters are either out of touch with reality or just out to make a fortune for them selves rather than actually interested in the plight of the African Massai Mara in his desperate strive to survive. History to these people is actually not about understanding the past to come up with meanings of the present challenges to enable them make prediction that solves problem but rather, a mere story telling exercise to demonstrate how much they know. We know they know and that is why we called them African Intellectuals, but our concerns are what is the use of their knowledge to us? What are we getting for the tax we paid for the schools they attended as we know very well that they were the sons and daughter of the village teacher who was struggling to make ends means like we were all doing? What is their reward to the African society that made them as the challenges are still consuming us all up?

Like the African leaders, there are some few good and sincere African intellectuals who are so few to make tangible impact enough to over rider the current trend of intellectual begging. The challenge to most of us is to try as much as possible to confront these individuals, with facts, figures and rational enough to let them know that we are not to be traded for their daily meals.

I beg to inform you that your responds tried as well to hide behind the concept of the African personality to justify the various traditional crude practices and why the African should sustain them. The word Kenya is an imperialist’s invention and so is the Kenya personality that evolved from it. The imperialists are always comfortable with what ever they made in Africa whilst the word Africa itself scares the imperialists as that was not their invention. The only sincere way to challenge the imperialists is the promotion of the African personality from the Union of African harmonized cultures perspective as against an isolated culture of Kenya that you appear to be defending. This practice only serves to defend the interest of our imperialists’ opponents rather than the African interest we think we are defending. In fact, most of what we referred to as African cultures is synonymous with poverty. The imperialists strive to encourage anybody that does anything to retain those African practices that allow the Western superior approaches of life further advantage in dominance over the inferior African systems.

I agree with you that these traditions, most of which are accumulations of millions of years of practices have some of their aspects worthy of being envy of, thus the need for their preservation. The concern is how can anything weak be able to preserve itself? How best can anything be preserve in this modern world than with the aid of technological advance means that exist in an industrialized environment? Is the Chinese case not a good example of these? In as much as I strongly support the encouragement of the preservation of these traditions internally as an intra-African thing, I unequivocally condemn the internationalization of this position, in favour of the common African personality. I will like to call your attention to the practice in Nigeria where these personalities are internalized while their common identity is externalized on the global scale.

I have spent too much time on what we are all doing right and what are doing wrong, which in themselves are not the way forward. We have a challenge that is why we are discussing by agreeing and disagreeing. What then is the way forward? Shouldn't we rather be calling on all the African intellectuals and academicians in what I called "the African intellectuals' grand debate on African Union Government's member states citizens popular participation in the Union election?" I shall be honoured to introduce a discussion on the topic. There is a strong case for a popular participation of the people in the African Union government. It is in fact an insult on the intelligence of the African intellectuals for 53 people to claim that they are having an election to choose somebody to work for 850 million people of the Union Government. There is a strong need in throwing a challenge to the African intellectuals on debating the case for a popular participation on the process of choosing by election the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, currently headed by Jean Ping. The position of the AUGCC (African Union Government Commission Chairperson) is evolving into what it was actually intended for and it will be coming with its dangers. We have every case of involving the people before it is too late and this debate will be the real starting point.

I will be concluding with the popular African saying whose meaning has eluded most Africans today, "Sankofa" literally meaning, "Go back for it". This practically means, going back into the past in search of what was done wrong that is making the present meaningless and the future gloomy, and using the discovered result in the search for the understanding of the present to confront the challenges of the future better.

I look forward to you on how we should go about the debate. Thank you,

7. Last words from Ali Abdul-Yekin, 16 July 2008

Dear Durrani, I happened to be reading from your write up on the above topic and I was finding it difficult to see where we actually differ in our common perception of the understanding of the African problem and the passionate need for solution. We are all basically saying the same thing. We are all saying none of us is happy with the way events are unfolding themselves in shaping our common destiny and we feel a strong sense of duty in being part of the solution.

I [am] working hard on the recent Zimbabwe cum proposed UN sanctions and the ICCJs (International Criminal Court of Justice) pronouncement on President Al Bashir of Sudan. As I will always like my write ups to reflect both the world's and African views, I will be using your article above as part of my Africa material source. Thank you.

Reference

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